

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you to give appropriate attention and priority to the needs of our nation's veterans in the Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposal you will soon be submitting to Congress.

The ongoing conflicts abroad necessitate that our country maintain well-trained, healthy, and disciplined armed forces. However, we should be mindful at all times that we must remain committed to the care of these men and women upon their return and separation from military service. Fulfillment of this obligation requires constant vigilance on the part of Congress as well as the Executive Branch.

As in years past, we plan to move forward in a bipartisan manner to provide adequate funding for the VA health care system. Merely covering payroll increases for VA health care personnel and medical inflation is not sufficient. Last year, Congress added \$1.2 billion in funding for VA medical care to the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for 2005. With tens of thousands of servicemembers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom will return home this year, each of us has a responsibility to ensure that the VA health care system receives full appropriated funding -- without reliance on increasing out-of-pocket fees to veterans.

It is imperative that VA is able to provide high-quality primary and specialty care in a timely manner, in addition to long-term and mental health care for those who require it. It is already apparent that both of these services will continue to be in high demand and we cannot ignore them as we shape the future of VA health care. We all have an obligation to the men and women who serve our nation to ensure that VA gets the funding it so desperately needs to meet these goals.

We sincerely hope that your budget will be a clear message to the heroes of our conflicts -- past and present -- that their sacrifices are not forgotten. Your support will go a long way in keeping the promises we have made to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Daniel K. Akaka



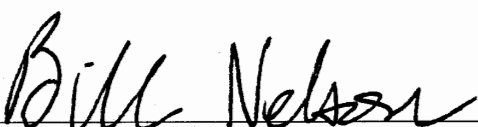
Carl Levin



Kent Conrad



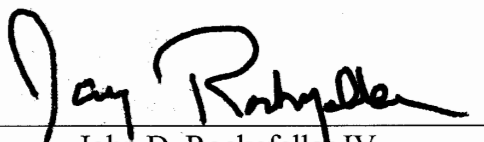
Patty Murray



Bill Nelson



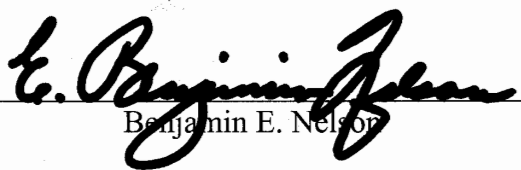
Byron L. Dorgan



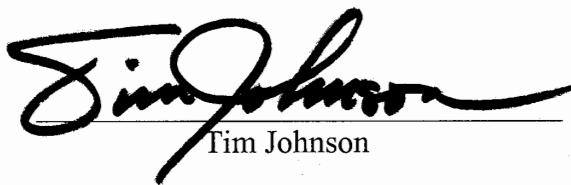
John D. Rockefeller IV



Richard J. Durbin



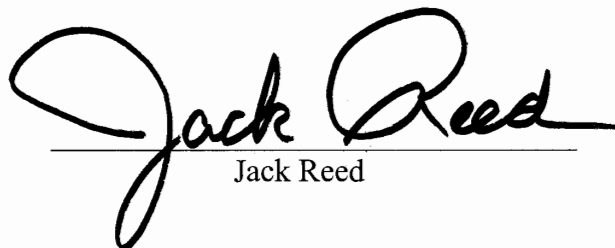
Benjamin E. Nelson



Tim Johnson



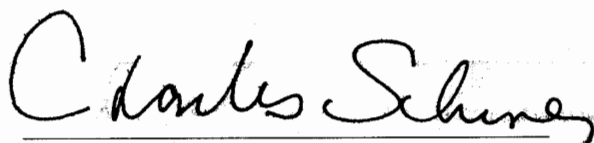
Frank Lautenberg



Jack Reed

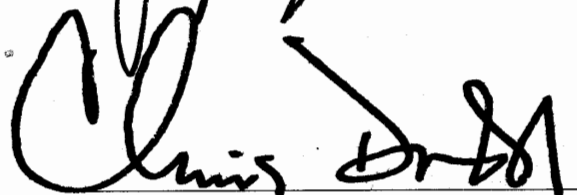
  
Hillary Rodham Clinton

  
James M. Jeffords

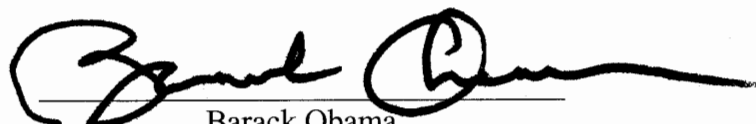
  
Charles E. Schumer

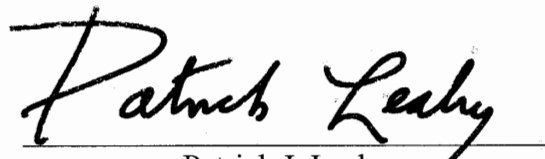
  
Jeff Bingaman

  
Debbie Stabenow

  
Christopher J. Dodd

  
Mark Dayton

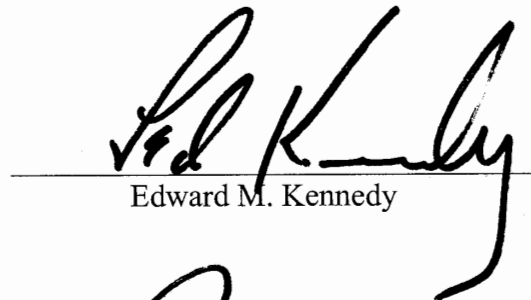
  
Barack Obama

  
Patrick J. Leahy

  
Harry Reid



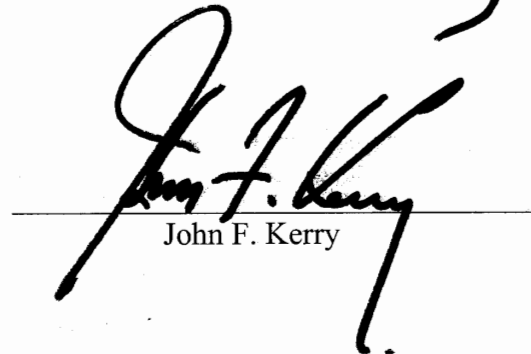
Mary L. Landrieu



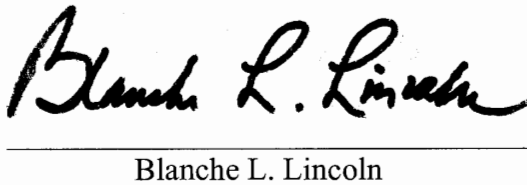
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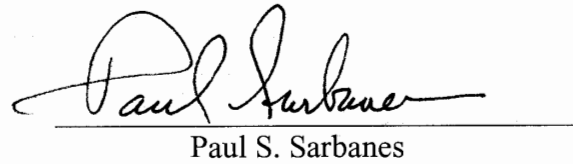
Maria Cantwell



John F. Kerry



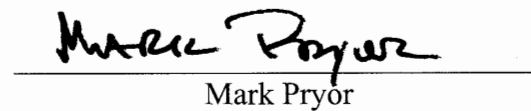
Blanche L. Lincoln



Paul S. Sarbanes



Barbara A. Mikulski



Mark Pryor



Max Baucus



Ken Salazar

The Honorable George W. Bush  
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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tom Harkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Harkin" clearly distinguishable.

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Tom Harkin